

Kato fastest from Slater in opening practice for Macau Grand Prix – FIA FR World Cup

Japan's Taito Kato led the way during the opening free practice session for the Macau Grand Prix – FIA FR World Cup on Thursday morning.

The ART Grand Prix driver, who competes under a French racing licence, moved to the top of the timesheets in the final three minutes of the session with a best lap of 2m16.412s, as drivers steadily got themselves up to speed on the challenging Guia Circuit.

Kato's closest challenger ended up being British youngster Freddie Slater, who is coming off the back of his championship success in Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine (FRECA) with Prema Racing.

Driving for the SJM Theodore Prema Racing squad in Macao, Slater had been among the early pace-setters before a red flag was brought out one-third of the way through the session when Hiroyuki Yamakoshi had to stop his Evans GP car at the Solitude Esses because his right rear wheel had come loose. Once Yamakoshi's car had been retrieved, practice resumed with 19-minutes left on the clock, and the times steadily came down as drivers built up their confidence.

Enzo Deligny, the Frenchman who drives for the R-ace GP squad, had been the first driver to get into the 2m18s, but his session lost momentum when he ran down the escape road at Lisboa with 10-minutes remaining. He was able to rejoin, and later set the fifth fastest time, but faced a post-session investigation for receiving outside assistance from marshals in getting his car back on track after his off.

Soon after Deligny's off, Slater lowered the benchmark twice before Kato moved to the top of the timesheets with his 2m16.412s lap that was not bettered. Slater's final effort before the chequered flag left him just 0.044 seconds off the top, with Spain's Mari Boya third and Frenchman Théophile Naël fourth.

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Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee